An Investigation of Effective Strategies in At-Risk Education

Master's Thesis

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

As education moves into the 21st Century, one fact becomes apparent. Each year the number of students dropping out of school increases (*The Condition of Education*, 1996; V. Grant [personal communication, December 4, 1996]). Current figures indicate that the rate of non-completion for high school students falls between eight and twelve percent (Baca, 1996; *The Nation*, 1995; V. Grant [personal communication, December 4, 1996]). This translates to approximately 500,000 students who leave school each year prior to graduation (Quinn, 1991) or 2,478 students each day (Natale, 1992). These students, labeled *at-risk* or *high-risk* by educators, often become a burden to society, costing taxpayers millions of dollars in support monies and lost income to communities. This situation has far-reaching implications not only for each individual but also for society.

An investigation implemented by the Governor's Study Committee resulted in significant findings regarding the difference in life prospects between completers and non-

completers of high school (as cited in Cline, 1988). This study revealed seven distinct differences:

1. Dropouts are more frequently unemployed.
2. The lifetime income for male dropouts is for male dropouts is approximately seventy percent of the income of high school graduates without college experience.
3. The dropout is six to ten times more likely to be involved in crime.
4. Eighty-five percent of state prison inmates are school dropouts.
5. Dropouts pay less tax monies and are often on welfare.
6. Dropouts have fewer employment opportunities and fewer advancements.
7. Dropouts experience less sense of worth and personal satisfaction. (p. 2)

Current data indicates that this situation has not improved in the past decade. It is presently estimated that each student who drops out of school will lose approximately $240,000 in lifetime earnings. This results in a loss of $228 billion in lifetime earnings for each graduating class nationally. This additionally results in a $64 billion loss each year in tax revenues, a $41 billion increase in welfare programs, and $3 billion annual increase in monies spent by the government to fight crime (Langford International, Inc., 1996). Added to this is the change in employment opportunities for dropouts as the United States has moved into a high-tech, global economy. No longer are there the numbers of highly paid, low skill jobs available to those who leave high

school before completion. This change has resulted in a 49% reduction in the average annual income of male high school dropouts since 1973 (Rossi & Stringfield, 1995).

The consequences of our failure as a society to address those disenfranchised students who fail to thrive in the present educational system are apparent. While much time, effort, and money is spent researching why our nation continues to produce increasing numbers of at-risk youth, the fact remains that the number of troubled youth is increasing each year (Miller, 1994). According to the Ohio Department of Education, more students are exiting our school system without diplomas or GED's each year than in previous years (V. Grant [personal communication, December 4, 1996]), and the burden of solving this multi-factored problem appears to have fallen upon the educational system. The question is what we, as educators, can do to slow the migration of these students from school, how teachers can meet the many needs of these at-risk students to keep them engaged so that they can complete high school? In economic, cost-effective terms it is apparent that there is a need to address this situation now rather than after the fact.

Significance of the Study

The term at-risk has become a frequently used phrase in the educational arena during the last decade. Since the 1983 release of "A Nation at Risk" by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, "the term at-risk catapulted into our language and has laid claim to a permanent place in the lexicon of education" (Lounsbury, 1996). As at-risk populations have increased, schools have been forced to face higher truancy statistics and escalating dropout rates. The result has been the emergence of a myriad of programs developed to assist the schools in dealing with their at-risk populations. At present, there is a disconnected group of educators offering a variety of services via many divergent models (Hicks, 1995). While some programs experience success with a few students, many are limited in the number of students they reach and are further limited in their success with at-risk students. Too often at-risk programs are short-lived and ineffective in the long run with these high-risk students (Lounsbury, 1996; Rossi & Stringfield, 1995).

Research reveals a need for operationally defined programs which incorporate consistent, commonly accepted strategies that can be developed into an effective at-

risk program design. The education system "must evolve more readily available and useful information on contextually effective program options" (Rossi & Stringfield, 1995) in order to work effectively with at-risk student populations.

It is the purpose of this study to investigate the strategies being used with at-risk high school students today. Various functional models will be examined to identify their program components. From these models a list of common elements within secondary at-risk programs will be compiled. Criteria for an effective at-risk high school program model will be established from the most successful and frequently used strategies to be determined from a review of the literature on this topic. From this determination a comparison will be made between an existing at-risk program model and the most effective strategies as evidenced in the literature reviewed.

Limitations

This study was limited to the high school at-risk population. The strategies investigated for use with this segment of school systems may have excluded intervention strategies that are effective with younger at-risk student populations. The study was further limited by the

lack of a consistent, universally accepted language that can be used when speaking about at-risk adolescents. The term at-risk itself may be defined in a wide variety of ways. An additional limitation of this study was the limited number of at-risk program models that could be investigated by this researcher. There are countless programs being utilized, many of which may be very effective in their efforts with at-risk students. It was impossible for this researcher to take into consideration the viability of all program models available. A final limitation to this study was the lack of any nationalized or state standards by which to evaluate at-risk programs.

Definition of Terms

At-Risk/High-Risk Students - Students who, on the basis of several risk factors, are unlikely to graduate from high school (Slavin, 1989).

High School - A secondary school offering the final years of high school work necessary for graduation, usually including grades 10, 11, 12 or grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 (*The Condition*, 1996).

Dropout - The term used to describe the event of leaving school before graduating and the status of an individual

who is not in school and who is not a graduate (*The Condition*, 1996).

GED - A test known as the General Educational Development Test which is administered by the American Council on Education as the basis for awarding a high school equivalency certification (*The Condition*, 1996).

Effective - Producing a desired or decided effect, in this case graduation from high school (Woolf, 1974).

Component - A constituent part of something (Woolf, 1974).

Student Assistance Program - School-based prevention and intervention programs that provide assistance services to students who are experiencing academic or social problems (Dean & Krebsbach, 1996).

Completion/Non-completion - fully and successfully carried out, in this context, achievement of a high school diploma (Woolf, 1974).

Truancy - Being absent from school without permission (Woolf, 1974)).

Mean - The arithmetic average of scores in a distribution (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1995).

Statistical Significance - The statistical difference between two variables, typically .05, used to reject the null hypothesis (Isaac & Michael, 1995).

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

> All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (NCEE, p. 1, visited 1998, July 16)

This vision statement presented to the Nation and the Secretary of Education by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 remains as much a challenge in 1998 as it was fifteen years ago. Research indicates that little has been done to equitably provide all youth with either the opportunities or tools to fulfill this promise.

Critics have pointed to growing illiteracy and dropout rates as evidence of the inability of our schools to meet the changing needs of a diverse student population (Renihan & Renihan, 1995). In 1993, over 12 million persons 18 years old and older had less than a ninth grade education, and 20% of adults over the age of 25 in the United States had not completed high school (Bureau of the Census, 1994). By 1992 12% of the eighth

grade class of 1988 had dropped out of school (NCES, 1994). As of October, 1994, 5% of students who were in grades ten to twelve the previous October were not enrolled again and had not graduated from high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). Even more alarming is the fact that every sixteen seconds of every school day, one of our children drops out of school (Splittgerber & Allen, 1996).

Hamby (1989) reminds us that "any dropout rate represents an incalculable loss of human potential and a staggering economic cost to society." Numerous studies have been made as a result of this growing concern regarding the increase in high school dropouts. It became obvious early on that in order to identify these marginal students, a definition had to evolve. This has resulted in the use of a great many terms to describe these marginal students. Among these is the term at-risk, which has taken a permanent place in the jargon of educators and those concerned with improving our educational system. It is an important term because it "generates a sense of urgency, which is appropriate considering the data on high school dropouts and employability of students with/without high school diplomas" (visited 1998, June 16).

However, the meaning of at-risk has never been precise and varies greatly among educators and situations (Manning & Baruth, 1996). Since its origination the term has been used loosely and applied broadly among teachers to identify the profile of this emerging student population (Langenfeld & Cumming, 1996). The fact that there is little agreement on a definition only increases the difficulty for educators dealing with this group of students.

A review of the literature indicates a range of interpretations of the term at-risk, from the very simple to those which are broad enough to put nearly every learner at risk of being at-risk at some point during their academic career. A number of studies base their definition of at-riskness solely on academic performance. For example, a study done at Albemarle County Public Schools in Virginia defined students at-risk as any having low grades which put them in danger of failing a subject for the year (Duke, 1993). Lounsbury (1996) simply defines these students as those "who are in danger of failing in the regular program, whatever the reasons for their presumed failure may be." Slavin (1989) defines at-risk as referring to students who, "on the basis of several risk factors, are unlikely to graduate from high

school." While these simplistic definitions are accurate, educators see adolescents faced with a variety of other problems which also put them at risk. As a result, the definition of an at-risk student has broadened in scope to include the multitude of factors that may place these students in jeopardy of withdrawing from high school before completion. Multi-contextual definitions have been expanded to include a broader spectrum of these adolescents' lives. The Phi Delta Kappa Study of Students at Risk started by including in the at-risk category all children who are likely to fail either in school or in life (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989). A review of previous research made it necessary to be more specific and the definition was expanded to include forty-five factors which contribute to at-riskness (1989). Hammons-Bryner (1994-95) includes a list of thirty-four identifying characteristics of at-risk students. A list this extensive could include almost all students at some point during their high school careers and opens a new and even larger arena for identifying at risk students to include those who might be at risk of being at-risk.

The implications of this research are obvious. This literature review reveals that almost any student can potentially be categorized as as-risk at some point in

his or her academic career. It is estimated that "by the year 2020, the majority of students in America's public schools will be living in circumstances traditionally regarded as placing them at risk of educational failure" (Rossi & Stringfield, 1995).

In the face of this staggering possibility, it is clear that the time is at hand to be more specific in the area of what works and does not work with these students at risk, regardless of why they are at risk. The myriad of programs which have appeared during the last decade to address these marginal students, each with its own criteria for identification, has created confusion and, perhaps, too many choices for educators trying to help these students achieve successful completion of high school. Research to date reveals a need to investigate at-risk programs and to develop a list of the most basic elements that would comprise an effective student assistance program. It is the intent of this writer to further review the literature to identify some of the foremost programs in existence today to ascertain what components are most frequently and successfully being used with at-risk students.

The difficulty in identifying model at-risk programs is not that there is a lack of them. Quite the contrary,

there are thousands. Spurred by grant money, both from public and private sources, at-risk programs are as numerous as the criteria that identify at-risk students. These programs include drug-free and prevention programs, programs for teen parents, special education programs, school-to-work programs, transitions programs, peer tutoring/counseling, and GED preparation. All are available to high school students in some capacity or another. Another dimension of the multitude of programs is that some address the philosophy of education and the social structure of the school itself. In researching the many facets of these numerous programs, one commonality seems to come to the surface repeatedly. That commonality is that someone must care about the student. This necessary element, which would seem to be an understood and widely accepted requirement, has become a basis for research into model at-risk programs. There are, however, other contributing factors that must accompany the caring component.

A report titled "Effective Schooling Practices and At-Risk Youth: What Research Shows" by Greg Druian and Jocelyn Butler, (visited 1999, April 15) identifies and describes characteristics which distinguish effective schools from those that are not. Based on a review of the

literature, Druian and Butler have synthesized research on effective schools and offer a summary of key characteristics that work with at-risk youth. Their research indicates that successful programs include specific strategies. First, dropouts are separated from other students. The second strategy indicates that successful programs for these students have strong vocational components. Also necessary, according to Druian and Butler, is the utilization of out-of-classroom learning. Finally, programs their research concludes that effective programs tend to be intensive, small, individualized with low student to teacher ratios, and tend to offer more counseling than the regular school curriculum (p.5).

A study of six model at-risk programs (Wehlage, as cited in Drurian & Butler, 1999) outlined several additional characteristics of effectiveness in working with at-risk youth. First is a group of administrative organizational characteristics. Small size allows individual needs of students to be given attention through frequent face-to-face interactions and monitoring. Program independence and freedom allows teachers the flexibility to respond quickly. Allowing teachers the authority to make decisions gives teachers a

sense of empowerment, which also raises their level of committment to the program. Second is a set of characteristics related to teacher culture. This refers to the sense of professional accountability for the program success and the optimism and confidence the teacher has about the program. Of additional importance, Wehlage indicates (as cited in Drurian & Butler, 1999) is the role the teacher plays in dealing with the "whole" student, which creates a sense for the student of being cared for. A third set of characteristics refers to student culture. "The single most valued characteristic of the programs is the "family atmosphere" (Wehlage, as cited in Drurian & Butler, 1999). Successful programs do not suppress crtiicism, but offer a positive and constructive atmosphere in which criticism can take place. A cooperative learning environment, where help may be obtained from other students of teachers and where team learning takes place is another necessary element of student culture. The fourth set of characteristics has to do with curriculum. Wehlage found that experiential activities, those which do not focus only on monetary rewards, are critical elements. The criteria for experiential education are: (a) optimal challenge with manageable conflict, (b) opportunities to exercise

initiative and responsibility, (c) tasks with integrity to reinforce the dignity of the student, (d) Providing a sense of competence and success, and (e) engaging the students in reflection about their experiences (Wehlage, as cited in Drurian & Butler, 1999, p. 6-7)).

Additional research on effective practices for at-risk high school students revealed the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, created through Johns Hopkins University and Howard University. The mission of this center is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at-risk. The Center, also known as CRESPAR, is supported as a national educational research center by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, United States Department of Education (visited 1999, April 16).

Research and Development Reports published by CRESPAR revealed a new and innovative program which originated in schools in the Baltimore, Maryland area in 1995 to address the needs of at-risk students (visited 1999, April 16). This program, created in partnership with CRESPAR, was called the Talent Development High School, so named because of the idea that

> too many children, expecially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that are based on a sorting paradigm in which some students receive high expectations instruction while the rest are relegated to lower quality education and lower quality futures. (p.2)

The Talent Development Model for high schools was created "to fill a major current void in American education—the lack of a proven model of high school effectiveness" (LaPoint, Jordan, McPartland & Towns, 1996). This experimental high school program replaced the sorting perspective typically seen in high schools with a talent deveolopment model that utilized the notion that all children are capable of succeeding in a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support (La Point, et al, 1996).

In creating the Talent Development High School, research was undertaken to determine what motivates students. Research was also reviewed to discern why dropouts have negative feelings about their experiences in high school and what common factors get students engaged in school. From this study the necessary components of the program were established. The components determined to be the most effective included making schoolwork relevant, providing opportunities for academic success, providing a caring and supportive

learning community, and providing help with student problems (McPartland, Legters, Jorday, & McDill, 1997).

In order for students to feel that schoolwork is relevant, it must connect with their own interests and goals. High school students are frequently bored by unchallenging and uninteresting work that is meaningless. The Talent Development Model identified four broad areas, called Academies, that students chose to follow. These academies addressed different types of occupations and careers. Within the academies, there were a variety of avenues for students to pursue: college-prep, tech-prep, or school-to-work. The students were provided with self-assessment and regularly received presentations about the academies offerings. In addition, practical guidance was given regarding college admission. Parents were also a part of the information process. Teachers received regular staff development regarding methods and approaches for teaching the greatly enriched curriculum (McPartland, et al, 1997).

Students earned credits for attending regularly and showing steady progress. However, for those that were not progressing, help was available. There were a variety of flexible resources for those having difficulty. Those resources included coaching classes offered by teachers,

tutoring clubs, and computer integrated learning systems for remediation. Teachers were held accountable for connecting needy students with extra help and had to document these efforts if a failing grade was assigned. In addition, students were given a variety of second chance methods to get back in step. Those second chances included summer school and individualized schedules (McPartland, et al, 1997).

Research revealed yet another program model shown to be successful in reducing the number of students who drop out of high school before completing. Project Transition is an at-risk program located at Bryan Station High School in Lexington, Kentucky (LaVey & Leland, visited 1999, April 17). This program was developed through a grant in 1992 to assist at-risk dropout prone students. The program has been so successful that it continues in operation today.

The success of this program is based on the utilization of specific strategies with the at-risk student population. According to LaVey and Leland (visited 1999, April 17) the umbrella of services used in the Project Transition Program include: (a) daily monitoring of attendance and follow-up calls to parent or guardian each morning; (b) contact with each of the

students every morning to gain an awareness of student needs; (c) assistance to teacher of the Project Transitions student; (d) individual tutoring involving student in various state and country-wide competitions; (e) conferences and interventions; (f) liason between outside public and private service agencies and school educational and career-shadow experiences; (g) career assessment and learning styles testing; (h) student support groups including teen parents, parents of teens, grief support, self-esteem, and conflict management; (i) training in study skills; and (j) provision of incentives and rewards for academic improvement and success.

There have been significant positive results from Project Transition. Data gathered from the program indicates consistent student improvement over a 5 1/2 year period, a 47% decrease in absences per pupil, a 21% decrease in suspensions per pupil, and a 47% improvement in academic performance (visited 1999, April 17). The staff at Project Transition reports that the personal touch and development of caring relationships with students, as well as their role as liaison between parents and school, have been the keys to the success of this program.

This review of the literature on effective strategies for at-risk high school students revealed several common program componenets which have resulted in successful intervention and dropout prevention with these students. These common threads among effective programs such as The Talent Development High School in Baltimore, Maryland and Project Transition in Lexington, Kentucky include: (a) providing a caring, family atmosphere; (b) offering a setting which provides small, individualized attention for students with a low student to teacher ratio; (c) helping students with individual problems; and (d) providing students with relevant vocational and adademic work.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology utilized in the completion of this study. In this chapter the researcher will describe the subjects, setting, research design, instrumentation, and data collection procedures.

Subjects and Setting

The subjects who participated in this study were 48 eleventh and twelfth grade students who were currently enrolled in a job training/vocational program at the Upper Valley JVS. The Upper Valley JVS is a career training center that serves between 800 and 1000 high school students annually. In addition, the JVS is a full-service adult education center. All of the students who completed the survey were receiving assistance in their academic pursuit through the help of a special program designed to help at-risk students. This program is called the Student Assistance Program. None of the students participating in the at-risk program have ever been identified as having a learning handicap or needing special education services. All students referred to this

at-risk program have factors such as failing grades, conflicts with teachers and/or other students, and disciplinary or attendance problems. In addition, all of the students have outside risk factors such as single parent homes, teen parenting, substance abuse, or legal problems in their background. The students have mixed academic abilities; however, all students are functioning cognitively at the ninth grade level or above. All of the subjects participate fully in academic classes. Expectations for these students are the same as for any student at the vocational school.

The students come from fourteen school districts from Miami and Shelby Counties. These counties have a mix of rural and urban areas and the students represent a combination of both areas. The economic levels are widely diversified as well. Economic status in the region ranges from wealthy to poverty base. The area has a large population of Appalachian heritage. The school has great community support as evidenced by the passage of levies and sound economic financial condition.

Design

The design for this study was descriptive and comparative research.

Data Collection and Instrument

Data collection for this study was based upon a survey of student attitudes toward the at-risk program in which they were participating and a separate and different survey given to administration and personnel to measure their perceptions of the successful components of the at-risk program at the JVS. Surveys were issued to forty-eight randomly selected students and to all administrative and teaching personnel. Fifty-one staff surveys were completed and returned to the researcher. The results of this data will be compiled and compared to the identified components linked with success of researched at-risk programs.

The instruments for this study were a twenty-two-question survey for students and a sixteen-question survey for administration and personnel. The questions on each survey asked respondents to evaluate their perceived attitudes toward the effectiveness of components used in the Student Assistance Program. Subjects were offered 5 response options using a five point Likert Scale. Scoring of the surveys was based on response values of 2 points for *strongly agree*, 1 point for *agree*, 0 points for *unsure*, -1 point for *disagree*, and -2 points for *strongly disagree*.

Analysis

Data from the survey was transferred to a disk and analyzed at the University of Dayton. Systat 7.0 for Windows (Wilkinson, 1996) was used to analyze and interpret the data sets presented in this study. Systat is owned by the more widely known statistical analysis company, SPSS. Using this program enabled the researcher to compile statistics which could be used to elucidate the topic under investigation. In the case of this study, descriptive statistics helped the researcher to understand the perceptions of student program participants and professional educators regarding the effectiveness of the at-risk program with which they were involved. Tests of statistical significance were undertaken to determine perceived effectiveness and the impact of demographic influences on the statistical results of this investigation.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this chapter was to determine if the components currently being utilized in the Student Assistance Program were perceived to be effective by survey respondents. The study was based on two separate surveys given to students and staff. Data from the student survey were calculated by gender responses. Student demographic data is shown in Table 1. Data from the administration and personnel survey were calculated on the basis of years of teaching experience, familiarity with the program, and gender responses. This demographic information is shown in Tables 6, 7, and 8. The final step in the calculation of data was to determine how the components utilized in the Student Assistance Program ranked when compared with the four most common components used in other at-risk programs found during the review of the literature. Data were reviewed to determine if there was statistical significance on responses to all items within each category.

Presentation of Results

Student Responses

When student survey respondents (n=48) were asked if they had made better grades since joining the Student Assistance Program, both male (n=32) and female (n=14) students concurred (mean=1.62) that they had achieved better grades. Only 2 males *disagreed*. While there was no significant difference in gender responses, mean scores of 1.59 for the male (n=34) respondents and 1.71 for the female (n=14) respondents indicated that female students were slightly more positive than male students when asked if participation in the program had resulted in grade improvements for them.

There was no significant difference between male (n=34) and female (n=14) responses when asked if their attendance improved after joining the program. Female respondents were more positive (mean=1.43) than males (mean=1.03). However, a combined mean score of 1.15 indicated that, as a group (n=48), the students *agreed* that their attendance had improved since joining the program. One male *strongly disagreed*, 6 were *unsure;*

while 1 female *disagreed*, and 2 were *unsure* if their attendance had improved.

Student responses (n=48) to a question concerning more suitable conflict management when dealing with teachers again resulted in more positive female responses (n=14) than male (n=34). Mean scores of 1.36 for female students and 1.15 for male students showed no significant difference, but the combined mean score (n=1.21) for this question reflected a favorable response from the group regarding better conflict management. Ten students, 8 males and 2 females, were *unsure* if they had more suitably managed their personal conflicts with teachers since joining the program.

There was little difference between male (n=34) and female (n=14) responses when asked if they felt more confident since becoming a part of the program that they would achieve their school goals of vocational training and a diploma or GED. Both female (mean=1.71) and male (mean=1.68) students responded positively, *strongly agreeing* that participation in the program had helped them with this goal. A combined mean score of 1.69 indicated a favorable response to this question. No respondents *disagreed*, but 2 male students stated that

they were *unsure* the program had helped them feel more confident about achieving these goals.

A survey question asking if students felt they had improved their organizational skills as a result of being in the program elicited less favorable responses from both males (n=34, mean=1.06) and females (n=14, mean=1.29). While there was no statistical significance between male and female responses to this question, a combined mean score of 1.12 indicated that students *agreed*, though not strongly, on this point. One male disagreed, and 7 male students felt *unsure* that the program had helped with their organizational skills. Only 1 female felt *unsure*.

When asked if they felt they could get help with both personal and school problems as a result of working with the Student Assistance Program, data indicated no statistical significance between responses. Students (n=48) *agreed* that they could get help, showing a combined mean score of 1.31. Male respondents (n=34) expressed less positive responses than female respondents (n=14), reporting a mean score of 1.21. The mean score for females in reply to this question was 1.57. Three

males *disagreed* that they could get help, while 5 males and 1 female were *unsure*.

Students were asked if they felt someone cared if they finished their classwork and that someone would help them if they had difficulty. The student respondents (n=48) *strongly agreed* that someone cared and would help, as indicated by a combined mean score of 1.71. There was little difference between male student (n=34) and female student (n=14) responses. Males showed a mean score of 1.68, while females reported a mean score of 1.79. No students felt *unsure* or *disagreed*.

When asked if there was a special person or place in the school building where they could go to get caring and support, the students (n=48) *strongly agreed* (mean=1.52) that there was such a person or place. As shown in Table 2, there was a statistically significant difference (t=-2.34,df=37,p=.03) between the responses of males (n=34) and females (n=14) to this question. Male students were significantly less positive (mean=1.41) than female students (mean=1.79) that being in the program offered them a person or place where they could get personal caring and support. One male and 2 females were *unsure*.

Students were asked if they felt that they could find someone to give them individualized attention since joining the program. While there was no significant difference in gender responses to this survey question, a mean score of 1.62 indicated that the group (n=48) *strongly agreed*. Males responses (n=34, mean=1.56) were less favorable than females (n=14, mean=1.79). No students were *unsure* or *disagreed* that they could find someone to give them individual attention in the program.

When responding to the question of whether they felt they could get help from another student if they needed it, the group (n=48) *agreed* they could, showing a mean score of 1.21. There was little difference between male (n=34) and female (n=14) responses, but males were less positive (mean=1.15) than females (mean=1.36). Two males and 5 females were *unsure* that they could get help from another student.

Data indicated that students (n=48) *agreed,* but not strongly, that they had improved their self-esteem by helping other students in the program complete their assignments (mean=1.02). Mean scores were not significantly different, and data indicated only a slight variation in responses to this question when calculated

by gender. Female respondents (n=14) showed a mean score of 1.06, while the male respondent's (n=34) mean score was .93. Six males and 4 females were *unsure*, and 1 male *disagreed* that they had improved their self-esteem by assisting other students.

When asked if someone would notice if they missed school, student (n=48) data showed a significant difference (t=-2.05,df=27.3p=.05) between male student (n=34) and female student (n=14) responses. As shown in Table 3, male students expressed significantly less favorable responses (mean=1,06) than female students (mean=1.50). As a group (n=48), students *agreed* that someone would notice if they missed school, showing a combined mean score of 1.19. Five male students and 1 female student were *unsure*, and 1 male *disagreed.*

When asked if they felt being in the Student Assistance Program helped them see how their schoolwork related to their future goals, males (n=33) once again felt less positive (mean=1.03) than females (n=14, mean=1.29) that this was true for them. Data indicated no statistical significance, but a combined mean score of 1.11 revealed that the group *agreed* that being in the program helped relate schoolwork to their goals. Nine

male students and 1 female were *unsure*, 1 female *disagreed*, and one male did not respond to this question.

There was little difference between male (n=34) and female (n=14) student responses when asked if they felt there was someone monitoring their attendance, grades, and discipline records. Males students (n=34), again, were less positive (mean=1.24) than females (n=14), who showed a mean score of 1.43. Non-gender calculations showed the mean for the group to be 1.29, indicating that students (n=48) *agreed* that someone was monitoring their attendance, grades, and discipline records. One male and 5 females were *unsure* that someone was monitoring, and 1 male *disagreed*.

Students were asked if the rules and conditions at school were not working for them, they felt there were people who would work with them on more suitable options. Data calculated on a non-gender basis revealed that the students (n=48) *agreed*, though not strongly, that this was the case, showing a mean score of 1.23. Females (n=14) felt more positive that there was someone who would help them find other options, as shown by their mean score of 1.43. Male students showed a mean of 1.15. Five females and 1 male were *unsure*.

Data indicated a concensus of all students (n=48) surveyed that they would receive vocational and career planning assistance from the program (mean=1.25). There was very little difference between male (n=34, mean=1.24) and female responses (n=14, mean=1.29). Three males and 3 females were *unsure* they would receive this assistance, and 1 male *disagreed*.

Responses to the question of whether or not being in the program gave the students a sense of family at school offered a wide range of replies. Data showed a statistically significant difference (t=-2.44,df=42.5,p=.02) between male and female responses when students were asked this question. As shown in Table 4, female students (n=14) in the program felt significantly more positive that being in the program gave them a feeling of family (mean=1.36). Male students (n=34), on the other hand, less than agreed that they got a sense of family from the program, exhibiting a mean score of .85. Eight males expressed *unsure* feelings in response to this question, and 3 males *disagreed* that they felt a sense of family in the program. As a group, the students (n=48) showed a mean score of 1.00,

indicating they *agreed* with the statement, though not strongly.

Students (n=48) concurred that being in the program helped them believe they could be successful in school, as indicated by a mean score of 1.44. Once again, female students (n=14) responded more favorably to this question with a mean score of 1.64, while male students (n=34) showed a mean of 1.35. Nonetheless, there was no significant difference between genders when asked this question. No students were *unsure* or *disagreed* that the program had helped them believe they could succeed at school.

There was a statistically significant difference (t=-2.94,df=31.2,p=.01) between the feelings of male (n=34) and female (n=14) students when asked if being in the Student Assistance Program had helped them believe they could be successful in their lives after school. Table 5 shows that male students felt significantly less positive (mean=1.24) than female students (mean=1.71). While both groups together (n=48) *agreed*, showing a combined mean score of 1.37, 3 males felt *unsure* that being in the program had helped them in this regard.

Summary of Student Data

An examination of student data revealed that of 19 survey questions, female students (n=14) gave more positive responses than male students (n=34) to every inquiry. Data calculated by gender indicated 4 areas of statistical significance between male and female responses. Data calculated on a non-gender basis showed that 15 survey items elicited responses from the group (n=48) in the *agree* range, and 4 of the 19 questions fell into the *strongly agree* range. No questions resulted in less than positive responses from the students as a group.

Administration and Personnel Responses

Staff responses were categorized using three different demographic groupings. First, responses were evaluated by gender. Table 4 shows gender configurations for this category. Next, responses were evaluated on a non-gender basis using familiarity with the program. These responses were ranked on a four point Liekert Scale with values of *very much* = 4, *somewhat* = 3, *not very much* = 2, and *almost nothing* = 1. Table 5 represents

demographic data for this category. Finally, responses were evaluated on a non-gender basis based on years of teaching experience for each staff member surveyed. To calculate data for this category, the years of experience were given number values, as shown in Table 6. The responses for all three areas were based on a five point Liekert scale described in the introduction to this chapter.

Both male (n=22) and female (n-26) staff members concurred that students in the program would receive individualized attention showing a combined mean score of 1.647. There was not a significant difference between male and female responses. The more familiar respondents were with the program, the more positive the responses. Of those with *somewhat* familiarity with the program (n=26), only one respondent expressed unsure feelings. Those with *very much* familiarity with the program (n=21) all agreed that students would receive individual attention. Data was consistent when comparing these results to those based on years of teaching experience. Of the 51 respondents, 98% (n=50) concurred. Only 1 expressed unsure feelings.

There was a statistically significant difference (t=2.011,df=45.000,p=.050) between the responses of male and female staff members when asked if students had shown an attitude change since joining the program, as shown in Table 9. Mean scores of 1.500 for males (n=22) and 1.080 for females (n=25) indicated that male staff members felt significantly more positive than female respondents that the students had shown an attitude change. Four subjects did not respond to this question. The results of this question based on responses calculated by familiarity with the program indicated that, of those who were *somewhat* and *very much* familiar with the program (n=46), 43 respondents concurred that there was a student attitude change which accompanied membership in the program. Three respondents who were *somewhat* or *very much* familiar with the program expressed unsure feelings to this question, and 2 expressed negative feelings. Out of respondents (n=4) who were in the *not very much* and *almost nothing* familiarity ranges, only 2 gave unsure responses to this statement. Data indicated that the more familiar staff members are with the program, the more positive the belief that participation in the program promoted attitude changes in students. Staff responses to

the question of attitude change calculated by years of teaching experience showed little difference among respondents based on this demographic categorization. Forty-six of all respondents (n=50) to this question gave positive responses when asked if they had seen an attitude change in program students, falling into an 80% or greater positive response range.

When asked if the Student Assistance Program had helped to increase the graduation rate at the JVS, male staff members (n=22) responded more favorably (mean=1.227) than females (mean=.846). Responses based on familiarity with the program showed that the majority (n=37) of the 47 respondents who had *somewhat* or *very much* familiarity with the program, responded positively to this question. Ten in these categories felt unsure, and 2 disagreed. Data based on teaching experience indicated that staff with less than 5 years of experience (n=5) were in 100% agreement with this statement, and those with more than 25 years of experience (n=13) agreed in 85% of their responses. Thirty-seven of all respondents (n=51) felt positive that the program had helped to increase the graduation rate. Twelve felt unsure, and 2 disagreed.

Both male and female staff expressed less than positive responses when asked if the program had helped to decrease their discipline problems, showing a combined mean score of .636. There was not a significant difference between male and female responses. Twenty-four of those who responded to this question (n=44) concurred that there had been a decrease in discipline problems due to the program, while 15 were unsure, and 5 disagreed. Those who were *very much* familiar with the program (n=17) responded the most positively to this statement agreeing in 11 surveys. More than half of the respondents with *somewhat* experience (n=23) were unsure (n=9) or disagreed (n=4) that the program had helped to decrease their discipline problems. Those staff members with 25 or more years of experience (n=11) concurred in 72% of their responses that the program helped in this area. Those in all other experience categories (n=33) answered less favorably, agreeing in only 49% of their responses.

When responding to the statement that students reacted more favorably in school after joining the program, both male and female staff (n=51) concurred that this was a true statement with a combined mean score of 1.098. There was not a significant difference between

male and female responses. Based on familiarity with the program, 43 respondents agreed with this statement. Seven staff members with *somewhat* experience with the program felt unsure, as did the only staff member in the *almost nothing* category. Those staff members with 25 or more years of experience (n=13) felt the most positive about this statement with 92% positive responses. Respondents in all other experience categories (n=38) concurred in at least 66% of all responses that being in the program helped students to act more favorable at school.

There was little difference between male and female responses to the statement that students in the program were getting a better educational experience. A combined mean score of 1.137 indicated that both genders agreed. Respondents with *somewhat* experience (n=26) with the program gave 20 positive responses and 6 unsure responses. Those with *very much* experience (n=21) felt unsure in only 3 responses. Total responses (n=51) were in the positive range, with 41 respondents concurring that students in the program were getting a better educational experience as a result of being in the program. Data based on years of teaching experience indicate that this has little bearing on responses to

this statement. Those staff members with 10 to 14 years of experience (n=7) were 100% sure students were receiving a better educational experience in the program. Respondents in all other experience categories (n=44) concurred in at least 66% of their answers.

Male staff members (n=22) responded more positively (mean=1.136) than females (n=26,mean=.808) when asked if the Student Assistance Program gave the school a better public image. Though these data showed no statistical significance, this difference in gender responses was of interest to the researcher. Those who were *somewhat* familiar (n=26) with the program concurred with positive responses in 15 surveys. Eleven in this category felt unsure that the program improved the school's public image. Those with *very much* experience (n=21) with the program responded positively to this statement in 16 surveys, with 5 respondents feeling unsure. Data indicated that those with *not very much* and *almost nothing* familiarity (n=4) were less poitive in this regard, giving 3 unsure responses and only 1 in agreement. Responses based on teaching experience were less positive. Those with 25 or more years of experience (n=13) concurred that the program improves the school's

image in 77% of their responses (n=10). The remainder (n=3) felt unsure. All other respondents (n=38), regardless of teaching experience, felt unsure about this statement in 37% of their combined responses.

There was no significant difference between male and female staff replies when asked if the students in the program were more relaxed and open since joining the program, and data indicates a less than positive response (mean=.863) to this statement. Staff who were *very much* familiar with the program (n=21) responded positively on 18 surveys, with 3 answering that they were unsure. Those staff with *somewhat* experience (n=26) with the program agreeded in 14 surveys that students were more relaxed and open, while 11 gave unsure responses. One respondent in the *somewhat* category disagreed with the statement. Those with *not very much* and *almost nothing* experience (n=4) expressed unsure responses on 2 surveys. Based on teaching experience, only 1 respondent with less than 5 years of experience disagreed. Data showed staff with over 25 years of experience (n=13) answered the most positively to this statement with 85% agreeing. Those (n=38) in the remaining experience categories were unsure

that students were more relaxed and open in 27% of their responses.

When asked if students get along better with their peers since joining the program, staff responded with a combined mean score of .706, indicating a less than positive response from those surveyed (n=51). There was no significant difference in gender responses to this question. Half of all respondents with a *somewhat level of* familiarity (n=26) with the program were less than positive to this question giving 11 unsure responses, 2 disagreeing, and 13 agreeing. This statement drew the largest number of negative responses of all survey questions with 23 of the 51 respondents expressing unsure or disagreeing replies. Data on this survey question calculated using teaching experience showed a marginally positive response with 55% of all respondents (n=51) agreeing and 45% less than positive. The most positive responses to this statement came from staff with more than 25 years of experience (n=13). Sixy-nine percent of these respondents concurred that students got along better with their peers after joining the program.

The survey question which asked if the program had a favorable image resulted in female staff members (n=26)

responding more favorably with a mean score of 1.231, while males (n=22) showed a mean score of 1.000. Nevertheless, this is not a statistically significant difference. Those who were *somewhat* familiar (n=26) with the program were unsure in 3 responses, while those with *very much* experience (n=21) were unsure in 4 responses. Forty-two of all respondents (n=51) concurred that the Student Assistance Program had a favorable image. Two out of the 4 staff members in the *not very much* and *almost nothing* categories of experience with the program felt unsure about the program image. Using emographic data based on teaching experience indicated that staff in the 10 to 14 years experience category (n=7) were the least positive of all respondents (n=51). Twenty-nine percent of these staff members felt unsure about the program having a favorable image. All other experience categories showed 80% or greater positive response that the program had a positive image.

When asked if the Student Assistance Program had a sound philosophy and was worth continuing, staff responses were the most positive in their responses of all the questions on the survey. A combined mean score of 1.560 indicated that surveyed staff members (n=50) viewed

the program in a positive light. Respondents at all levels of familiarity with the program were also in concurrence that the program was sound and worth continuing. Data indicated that the more experience staff had with the program, the more positive their responses were. Those with *very much* experience (n=21) with the program strongly agreed in 16 responses. The amount of teaching experience respondents had showed little influence on their responses to this statement. However, staff members with 10 to 14 years of experience (n=7) gave the most positive responses, with 86% strongly agreeing. All respondents (n=50) were in 100% concurrence that the Student Assistance Program was sound and worth continuing.

Summary of Administration and Personnel Data

An examination of staff data based on gender revealed that of 11 survey questions, male respondents expressed more positive responses on 8 items. Only 1 item elicited responses that were of statistical significance. Male staff members were significantly more positive that they had observed an attitude improvement in students who participated in the program than were female staff

members. Calculating data using familiarity with the program as the demographic factor showed that on 9 out of 11 questions, those staff with *very much* familiarity with the program offered the most positive responses of the four groups. Staff members at the highest level of teaching experience, *25 years or more*, responded the most positively in their survey responses on 4 items. Those with *10 to 14 years* expressed the most positive perceptions on 4 survey items. In 2 cases the most positive responses came from staff with *15 to 19 years*, and staff with the least experience, *less than 5 years*, expressed the most favorable responses on 1 item.

Program Component Data

The final statistical analysis of this investigation was implemented to determine if components being used with students in the Student Assistance Program were perceived to be effective when compared to the most commonly used components being used in other at-risk programs, as revealed by a review of the literature. These components were a caring, family-type atmosphere; small individualized attention with low student to teacher ratios; help with individual problems; and

relevant vocational and academic work. Data for this analysis was calculated using student survey responses based on the demographic factor of gender. The results of this data analysis revealed 2 areas of statistical significance.

When comparing Student Assistance Program components to a caring, family-type atmosphere, data indicated that there was a statistically significant difference (t=-2.51,df=35.4,p=.02) in the perceived effectiveness of this aspect of the program between male (n=34) and female (n=14) respondents. Female students felt significantly more positive (mean=4.93) than male students (mean=3.94) that the program offered a caring, family-type atmosphere for them.

Data also indicated a statistically significant difference (t=-1.97,df=46,p=.05) in responses between male (n=34) and female (n=14) students when analyzing program component effectiveness based on small, individualized attention with low student/teacher ratios. A mean score of 4.71 indicated that female students felt significantly more positive than males (mean=3.85) that the program was effective in offering this component to them.

There was no significant difference between male (n=34) and female (n=14) responses when offering their perceptions of program effectiveness in regard to help with individual problems. Once again, female students expressed more positive feelings that this program component was effective for them, as indicated by a mean score of 4.36 compared to a mean of 3.50 for the male students.

Female students (n=14) were, again, more positive than male students (n=34) in their responses to the effectiveness of the program in providing relevant vocational and academic work. Data indicated that female students perceived this aspect of the program in a more positive light (mean=4.29) than males (mean=3.47). Nonetheless, there was not a statistically significant difference in gender responses when evaluting the effectiveness of this program component.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies most commonly used with at-risk high school students. A review of the literature was implemented to determine which program components experts considered to be the most effective when working with this student population. Various program models were examined to identify those strategies, which elicit the most success with at-risk students. With these investigative findings, the researcher, then, examined an existing at-risk program. This program, called the Student Assistance Program, was evaluated by survey respondents to determine their perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Finally, strategies utilized in this at-risk program were compared to the components found to be the most effective with at-risk students, as determined from a review of the literature.

Research for this project was completed using a variety of sources. Periodical and journal articles were obtained from several University libraries. Telephone inquiries and interviews were held with the State

Department of Education to obtain the most current information on at-risk programs currently in existence in Ohio. The National Department of Education was contacted to ascertain the most current dropout data. The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and several on-line sources were used to further research this problem. Additionally, the researcher's 15 years in education working with at-risk high school students offered invaluable knowledge based on actual experience, as well as data which could be utilized in the implementation of this study.

Justification of the need for a study in the area of effective practices for at-risk students was demonstrated through an extensive investigation of the concept of at-risk students and programs that have experienced success keeping these students in school and helping them to achieve graduation. A thorough study of these programs revealed that four common components appeared to be the most effective when working with at-risk students. These common components included a caring, family type atmosphere, small group and individualized attention for students with low student to teacher ratios, help for

students with individual problems, and relevant vocational and academic work.

Of additional interest to the researcher were the perceptions of student program members and staff at the Upper Valley JVS regarding the effectiveness of this program. This was determined with the use of surveys administered to each group evaluating their perceptions of the program. Data based on several demographic groupings were also analyzed in order to benefit the researcher, as well as to provide valuable information that can be used to improve the Student Assistance Program. Responses analyzed on the basis of gender, familiarity with the program, and years of teaching experience offered invaluable data which will assist program coordinators in working with both staff and at-risk students more effectively in the future.

The results of the statistical analysis of the instruments used in this study revealed interesting findings. All students perceived the program in a positive light, but female students had a more positive perception of the program than male students in response to every survey question. This would lead this researcher to conclude that female students tend to feel more

connected to the program and develop a more personal connection with the program coordinators. While this could be nothing more than a gender issue, greater attention might be given to enhancing the program atmosphere to draw male students firmly into the program. Another conclusion might be drawn from these study results when considering that there is a 3:1 ratio of males to females in the program, and both coordinators are females. The statistical results of this study, which revealed a less positive response from male students in the program, might indicate the need for a male member of the at-risk instructional team. Further investigation would be warrented to discover if this is a valid conclusion to be drawn from the results of this study.

The last area of data analysis in this study produceded findings consistent with student survey results. When comparing the strategies utilized in the Student Assistance Program to the 4 most commonly used strategies discovered while researching this topic, again, female students expressed more positive perceptions of strategy effectiveness than male students.

This researcher found that student survey respondents expressed very positive feelings overall

about the program and its effectiveness for them. The conclusions that can be drawn from this positive response from program participants are many. However, of utmost importance to this researcher is the implication that the program is effective in its efforts to keep students in school and to help them overcome obstacles in their lives so that they can obtain high school diplomas.

The evaluation of staff perceptions of the effectiveness of the Student Assistance Program revealed additional areas of interest. While all respondents perceived the Student Assistance Program to be effective, male educators offered more positive responses to survey questions. One area of statistical significance resulted from data analysis of gender responses. Male staff members perceived students in the program to have improved attitudes significantly more favorably than female staff. This would suggest a need for increased efforts with program participants in developing improved communication and behavior skills in classrooms led by female instructors. The wide range of expectations and personalities of the instructors with whom students interact during the course of a school day could warrent closer attention by program coordinators.

Three areas of concern became apparent to this researcher after analyzing survey data. With a mean score of 1.0 representing agreement, instructors expressed perceptions that fell below this score, indicating they did not agree or were unsure that the program had decreased their discipline problems with these at-risk students. Staff respondents also showed mean scores below 1.0 in response to program participants being more relaxed and open and getting along better with their peers. This, perhaps, implies the need for greater efforts by program coordinators to work with these students to improve attitudes, promote open communication, and enhance peer relationships. Students might benefit from group workshops in conflict resolution and anger management. Opportunities for students to interact in a more relaxed and open setting than the classroom provides could be achieved through group implemented community service activities.

Staff responded very favorably when asked if they perceived the program to have a sound philosophy and felt it was worth continuing. This positive response indicates that staff survey respondents believe in the merit of the program and the services it provides for at-risk students

in the building. This expression of staff support for the continuation of the program, along with the suggestions for improvement drawn from survey responses, will be of great benefit to the evolution of this at-risk program.

Demographic analysis based on familiarity with the program and years of teaching experience offered predictable results. The more familiar staff respondents were with the program, the more positive their perceptions of the program. Additionally, the more experience staff had in education, the more positive their perceptions of the program's effectiveness. There is an obvious need for improved staff exposure to and education about the program, but especially with in-coming instructors and those who have been teaching for less than 5 years. In-service opportunies for the entire staff could be utilized to promote familiarity with the program, and presentations about the program need to be offered as a part of new faculty orientation to the school. In addition to these possible opportunities, it is the conclusion of this researcher that there is a need for better communication between program coordinators and all staff who work with these students.

Included in the survey were opportunities for respondents to express their suggestions for improvement of the Student Assistance Program. The majority of all staff who participated in this study strongly suggested the addition of another at-risk instructor. Students also concurred that this was a needed improvement. Currently, the program provides support services for 175 to 200 students during a school year. The two program coordinators offer the majority of support and assistance for the students and find this ratio very difficult to manage efficiently. There is no doubt that this high student/teacher ratio diminishes the effectiveness of the program. The majority of these students require individual or small group assistance, which is extremely difficult to provide under these circumstances. An additional instructor, perhaps a male as previously suggested, would greatly enhance the program and its effectiveness in working with at-risk students.

This study has revealed interesting information about one particular at-risk program in operation currently and has offered the researcher the opportunity to draw conclusions and make recommendations for the improvement of that program. However, and more

importantly, this study has also resulted in significant findings which can be applied to a much broader realm of education. "Our nation faces very serious challenges in serving at-risk students" (Rossi & Stringfield, 1995). The issues of how we are to retain these potential dropouts and how we can provide these disenfranchised students with an education that is of quality and relevance have become of critical importance in education. A rapidly increasing national dropout rate suggests that the crisis is at hand and must be addressed now. Given that the number of students being identified as high-risk is increasing each year (Miller, 1994); and, if Rossi and Stringfield are correct in saying that by 2020 more than half of students in our schools will be at-risk (1995), the implications of these comments from educational experts are of paramount importance. They offer a call to those of us in the field to rise to this crisis and to strive to find viable solutions.

This study has generated some questions of importance to the future of education in this country. It has reinforced the conclusion that there is a need for uniformity of standards at the state, if not national, level in the arena of at-risk student education. It has

further clarified, in the mind of this researcher, the great need for new and innovative approaches within school systems to retain and educate the growing at-risk student population. And finally, this study exposes the need for further research on at-risk student education to determine what legislative action, if any, is occurring to assist educators in developing innovative methods and expertise in the education of at-risk students. There is a justifiable need for legislative initiatives that will require all schools to implement programs designed to retain and assist this large and rapidly increasing student population and to offer them the opportunity for an equitable education and an educational culture that will allow them to develop their minds and spirits to the utmost (NCEE, 1983).

Table 1

Student Gender

Gender	n	%
Male	34	70.83
Females	14	29.17
Total	48	100

Table 1 indicates the gender of the students participating in the survey. Of the 48 respondents, 34/71.83% were male, and 14/29.17% were female.

Table 2

Special Person or Place to Get Caring and Support

Response	n/male	n/female
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Unsure	3	0
Agree	14	3
Strongly Agree	17	11
Total	34	14

Table 2 indicates there was a statistically significant difference (t=-2.34,df=37.0,p=.03) between the responses of male and female students in the program regarding the belief that there is someone or someplace in the building where they can go for caring and support. Female students felt significantly more positive (mean=1.79) that there was such a person or place than male students (mean=1.41).

Table 3

Someone Notices When I Miss School

Response	n/male	n/female
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	1	0
Unsure	5	1
Agree	19	5
Strongly Agree	9	8
Total	34	14

Table 3 indicates there was a statistically significant difference (t=-2.05,df=27.3,p=.05) between the feelings of male and female students in the program regarding someone noticing if they miss school.Female students felt significantly more positive that someone would notice if they missed school (mean = 1.50) than male respondents (mean = 1.06).

Table 4

Feeling of Having a Family at School

Response	n/male	n/female
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	3	0
Unsure	8	0
Agree	14	9
Strongly Agree	9	5
Total	34	14

Table 4 indicates that there was a statistically significant difference (t=-2.44,df=42.5,p=.02) between male and female perceptions of the program offering a feeling of family. Male students felt significantly less positive (mean=.85) than female students (mean=1.36).

Table 5

Can Be Successful in My Life After School

Response	n/male	n/female
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Unsure	3	0
Agree	20	4
Strongly Agree	11	10
Total	34	14

Table 5 indicates there was a statistically significant difference (t=-2.94,df=31.2,p=.01) between male and female student perceptions that the program had helped them feel they could be successful in their lives after school. Female students were significantly more positive (mean=1.71) than male students (mean=1.24) that the program had helped them believe they could be successful after school.

Table 6

Administration/Personnel Gender

Gender	n	%
Male	22	43.14
Female	26	50.98
No Response	3	5.88
Total	51	100

Table 6 indicates the gender of the staff participating in the survey. Of the 51 respondents, 22/43.14% were male, and 26/50,98% were female.

Table 7

Administration/Personnel Familiarity With Program

Level	n	%
Almost nothing	1	1.96
Not very much	3	5.88
Somewhat	26	50.98
Very much	21	41.18
Total	51	100

Table 7 represents demographic information for staff respondents based on familiarity with the program. Values of almost nothing = 1, not very much = 2, somewhat = 3, and very much = 4 were given to each category. Out of 51 respondents, 1/1.96% of the respondents had almost no experience with the program. Three/5.88% had not very much experience with the program, 26/50.98% were somewhat familiar with the program, and 21/41.18% of the respondents were very familiar with the program.

Table 8

Administration/Personnel Years of Teaching Experience

Years	n	%
Less than 5	5	9.80
5 to 9	6	11.76
10 to 14	7	13.73
15 to 19	8	15.69
20 to 25	12	23.53
More than 25	13	25.49
Total	51	100

Table 8 represents demographic data for staff based on years of teaching experience. Out of 51 respondents, 5/9,80% had less than 5 years of experience; 6/11.76% had between 5 and 9 years; 7/13.73% had 10 to 14 years; 8/15.69% had 15 to 19 years; 12/23.53% had 20 to 25 years; and 13/25.49% had more than 25 years of teaching experience.

Table 9

Student Attitude Change After Joining the Student Assistance Program

Response	n/m	n/female
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	1
Unsure	2	3
Agree	7	14
Strongly Agree	13	7
Total	22	25

Table 9 indicates there was a statistically significant difference (t=2.011,df=45.0,p=.050) between male and female staff perceptions that being in the program had resulted in student attitude changes. Male staff were significantly more positive (mean=1.50) than female staff (mean=1.08) that student program participants had shown attitude changes after joining the program. One female did not respond to this question, and 3 respondents did not designate gender.

STUDENT SURVEY

Components of researched At-Risk Programs which are common include:

1. Caring/family-type atmosphere
2. Small individualized with low student/teacher ratio
3. Help with individual problems
4. Relevant vocational and academic work

This survey was created to measure your feelings/impressions of your progress in the Student Assistance Program at the JVS. Please indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. I have achieved better grades since I began working with the Student Assistant Program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

2. I have improved my school attendance since working with the Student Assistance Program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

3. I have managed my personal conflicts with my teachers in a more suitable way since working with the Student Assistance Program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

4. I now feel more confident that I will reach my goal of vocational training and a high school diploma or GED.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

5. I feel as though my organizational skills have improved.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

6. I feel that I can get help with my personal as well as my school problems as a result of working with the Student Assistance Program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

7. I feel as though someone cares that I finish my classwork and will help me if I have difficulty.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

8. I feel there is a special place/person in the school building where I can go and get caring and support.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

9. If I need extra help, I know I can find someone who will be able to give me individualized attention.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

10. When doing work in the Student Assistance Program, I feel I can also ask other students for help.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

11. I often improve my self-esteem by helping other students complete assignments.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

12. If I do miss school, I feel that someone will notice.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

13. The Student Assistance Program helps me to see how my schoolwork will relate to my future goals.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

14. I feel there is someone in this school who monitors my attendance, grades, and discipline record.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

15. If the rules/conditions at school don't work for me, there are people who will work with me on other options that are more suitable to my situation.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

16. I receive vocational/career planning assistance from the Student Assistance Program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

17. The Student Assistance Program gives me the feeling of having a family at school.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

18. Being in the Student Assistance Program has helped me believe that I can be successful in school.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

19. Being in the Student Assistance Program has helped me believe that I can be successful in my life after school.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Unsure _____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

20. How is this school different than other schools you have attended?

21. Can you identify one thing that has helped you be more successful in school?

22. How would you change this school?

ADMINISTRATION AND PERSONNEL SURVEY

Components of researched At-Risk Programs which are common include:

1. Caring/family-type atmosphere
2. Small individualized with low student/teacher ratio
3. Help with individual problems
4. Relevant vocational and academic work

How familiar with the Student Assistance Program at the JVS are you?

_____very much _____some what _____not very much _____almost nothing

How much experience do you have in education? Approximately ____ years.

This survey was created to measure your feelings/perceptions of the Student Assistance Program at the JVS. Please either answer the following questions, or indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statements:

1. What do you consider the (most important) purpose of the Student Assistance Program?

2. Student referred to the Student Assistance Program will receive some type of individualized attention.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

3. I have seen students make an attitude change as a result of being referred to the Student Assistance Program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

4. The graduation rate of our school has increased due to Student Assistance Program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

5. I refer students to the Student Assistance Program for the following reasons:

6. The Student Assistance Program has helped lessen my discipline problems.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

7. The students I know who are in the program react more favorably to the school, in general, than before they were in the program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

8. I feel the students in the program are getting a better educational experience than they were able to get in a regular classroom setting.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

9. The program has given our school a better public image.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

10. The students seem more relaxed and open since their experience in the program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

11. The program has helped students get along better with their peers.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

12. People I am in contact with seem to favor the program.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

13. The basic philosophy of the program is sound and worth continuing.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree_____Unsure_____Disagree_____Strongly Disagree

14. What are the strongest points of the program?

15. What are the weakest points of the program?

16. What have you seen in other programs or what creative additions to this program would you suggest?

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